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Styles of Writing and the Afghanistan Model of Warfare
Submitted for the Spring 2007 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handout

Govt 100.3: Power, Tragedy, and Honor: The Three Faces of War
Instructor: Andrew Yeo

Political scientists read a wide variety of sources to keep abreast on domestic and international news. I designed this assignment to familiarize students with different styles of writing in political science (or more specifically, international relations and foreign policy analysis). Undergraduate students interested in international politics follow world events through different newspapers, magazines, TV news programs, the internet, or news magazines. However, when studying international relations, students are assigned academic or policy journals which provide more substantive content and analysis. Students will find that academic journals, policy journals, and popular media will all vary in style, prose, and political orientation. For instance, I assigned two articles about air power by Robert Pape to coincide with the week students participated in the styles of writing exercise: one was published in *Foreign Affairs*, the other was published as an op-ed in the *New York Times*. The main arguments were identical, but the style of writing differed substantially. Unlike the succinct, normative driven *New York Times* op-ed piece, Pape provided more historical background and technical information in his *Foreign Affairs* article. Pape also used more “foreign policy jargon” and provided a much more nuanced treatment of alternative arguments and explanations. Interestingly, these articles were based on Pape’s academic press book, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Cornell University Press 1996). Although I did not assign the book, I centered my class discussion around his theories of strategic air coercion and used the book to also illustrate “academic” style of writing compared to “policy” writing and “op-ed” writing.

I used “**Styles of Writing and the Afghanistan Model,**” as an in-class writing exercise. I designed the assignment with four goals in mind. I wanted students to learn how to 1) distinguish between different sources in political science: academic journals, policy journals, newspapers, and news magazines; 2) identify the type of content each source tended to provide; 3) recognize the style of writing in each source and its intended audience; and 4) adopt an appropriate style of writing for their own work.

I also wanted students to recognize differences in style and prose since I built in assignments throughout the course which would require different styles of writing. For instance, students were expected to write an essay in favor or against the use of precision guided weapons in the style of an op-ed article. Another essay required students to choose a theoretical level of analysis when explaining the causes of international conflict, and then use the Korean War as a case study to test their theory. An essay towards the end of the semester was written as a UN policy paper recommending action on Darfur, Sudan, based on past failures of the international community during the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Students were expected to adopt an appropriate style of writing for each assignment.

I included this in-class assignment during week six when we discussed tactics and strategy in war. On week six, day one (Feb. 27), students read a policy article, magazine article, and op-ed piece on the use of air power in war. On week six, day two (Mar. 1), students read an excerpt from an academic book, policy article, and a newspaper article on technology and new military strategy. The readings were selected to give students exposure to a variety of writing styles. The actual in-class exercise was then based on one of the assigned readings for the week: Biddle, Stephen. "Afghanistan and the Future of Warfare." *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 2 (2003).

I chose the introduction to this article, and the introduction (or first few paragraphs) of three other articles which were all about the "Afghanistan Model" of combat (reliance on high-tech gadgets and special operations forces). However, each excerpt was taken from a different type of source. The four articles I used are provided below:

1) Policy Article (Foreign Affairs)

Biddle, Stephen. "Afghanistan and the Future of Warfare." *Foreign Affairs* 82 (2), 2003.

2) Academic article (International Security)

Andres, Richard B, Craig Wills, and Thomas E. Griffith. "Winning with Allies; The Strategic Value of the Afghan Model." *International Security* 30 (3), 2005.

3) Popular press (USA Today)

Moniz, Dave. "Afghanistan's lessons shaping new military." *USA Today*. October 8, 2002, p.13A.

4) In-depth newspaper analysis/op-ed (The New York Times)

Gordon, Michael. "Gains and Limits in New Low-Risk War." *The New York Times*. December 29, 2001, Section A; Column 3.

Students were asked to write down any differences in style they noted in the excerpts. I also provided the following additional questions for students to reflect on before discussing the excerpts as a group: What are some plausible sources of these excerpts (i.e. newspaper, academic journal, popular press)? Which introductions were easy or hard to read? Did you notice any difference in the choice of words or phrases? Who do you think was the intended audience of the article? I gave the students 10-15 minutes to write down their answers. As a class, students then tried to guess possible sources for each excerpt. We then discussed differences in writing style among the four excerpts.

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Assignment: Below are excerpts from four different types of sources. All four sources were taken from the introduction, and discuss the war in Afghanistan after 9/11 which led to a shift in strategy and tactics by the U.S. military. After reading each excerpt, write down any differences in style you noted in the excerpts below. To help you get started, you might consider the following questions: What are some plausible sources of these excerpts (i.e. newspaper, academic journal, popular press)? Which introductions were easy/hard to read? Did you notice any difference in the choice of words or phrases? Who do you think was the intended audience of the article? How might the language or style change depending on the author's intended audience?

1) America's novel use of special operations forces (SOF), precision weapons, and indigenous allies has attracted widespread attention since its debut in Afghanistan, proving both influential and controversial. Many believe it was responsible for the Taliban's sudden collapse. They see the "Afghan model" as warfare's future and think it should become the new template for U.S. defense planning. Others, however, see Afghanistan as an anomaly -- a non-repeatable product of local conditions. Both camps are wrong. The Afghan campaign does indeed offer important clues to the future of warfare, but not the ones most people think -- because the war itself was not fought the way most people think. Both sides in the debate assume that the Afghan campaign was waged at standoff ranges, with precision weapons annihilating enemies at a distance, before they could close with U.S. commandos or indigenous allies. For proponents of the Afghan model, this is what gives the model its broad utility: with SOF-guided bombs doing the real killing at a distance, even ragtag local militias will suffice as allies. For Afghan model detractors, conversely, it is the apparent ability to annihilate from afar that makes the campaign seem so anomalous and a product of idiosyncratic local factors.

2) The military campaign in Afghanistan was a striking success for a new style of warfare, in which American commandos took center stage and played a vital role in organizing the Afghan resistance and directing punishing airstrikes. The novel strategy enabled the United States to topple the Taliban, install a friendly government and ensure that Al Qaeda could no longer use Afghanistan as a base for terrorism. Those ends were achieved with a small number of American ground troops, with little political backlash in the Muslim world about an "occupying" Western army and with a very limited loss of American lives. Having brought important gains at modest cost, this is an approach the Pentagon may be tempted to repeat as it plans military campaigns against Iraq or terrorist organizations around the world. But the American strategy also had a decided drawback: the decision to let proxy forces bear the brunt of the ground fighting may have allowed many Al Qaeda and Taliban leaders, and possibly Osama bin Laden himself, to escape.

3) In this article, we argue that the pessimism that has characterized analysis of the Afghan model is misplaced. Airpower, special forces, and indigenous troops (even those with relatively little training) form a powerful and robust combination. While events in Afghanistan and later in northern Iraq demonstrated the costs and the benefits of using the model, when these are compared with the costs and benefits of deploying heavy divisions, and particularly the costs of creating new governments without indigenous war allies, the model performs well. Moreover, because this new way of war lowers the costs to the United States, in both blood and treasure, it creates a more credible stick to use in coercive diplomacy against small- and medium-sized opponents than do threats of conventional invasion. The lesson of Afghanistan and Iraq is that, when used correctly, the Afghan model offers the United States strategic advantage and leverage abroad. Below we analyze how this new way of war performed in Afghanistan and later in Iraq. The study explores how the techniques came about in the face of a largely skeptical military establishment, why they worked, and some of their strengths and weaknesses. We conclude with a discussion of the strategic implications of the model for future U.S. military diplomacy.

4) Without a single battle tank or armored troop carrier, the United States and a ragtag rebel army routed Afghanistan's Taliban to claim the first major battle of the 21st century. The Pentagon's most important weapons: elite commandos riding into battle on horseback and thousands of satellite-guided smart bombs. But any elation over America's sudden victory in Afghanistan was tempered by spotty intelligence, civilian casualties, training that isn't tailored to fighting terrorists and the vexing uncertainty over whether al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden is alive or dead. Those successes and failures have prompted the military to re-examine many fundamental practices, from how it recruits special operations troops to how it trains to fight agile, shadowy foes. Some of the changes were under way before Sept. 11, 2001. But it's clear that the war on terrorism will lead to robust funding for defense, radically new weapons, unconventional battlefield tactics and closer ties between the uniformed military and U.S. intelligence agencies.